

**Testimony by Nancy Robertson, State Librarian,
before the Michigan Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
for the Department of History, Arts and Libraries.
May 8, 2008**

Good afternoon, Chairman George and Senators Brown and Clark-Coleman. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today about the Library of Michigan and the importance of all of the libraries of our state.

This year, we again offered our very popular Notable Books program. The list of 20 notable Michigan books highlights all that is Michigan. Additionally, \$66,000 of Michigan Humanities Council grant funds and private and corporate sponsorships donated to the Library of Michigan Foundation support the annual authors tour (currently underway) as well as the Night for Notables event just held late last month with a full house of over 200 people at the Library of Michigan. This year 57 Michigan libraries from all areas of the state host the participating notable authors at their libraries for presentations about their book, book signings and conversation with the thousands of residents who flock to these events each spring.

Again, thanks to the work of the Library of Michigan Foundation, in partnership with the libraries and cultural institutions of southeastern Michigan, and with public relations funding from Macy's, the Michigan Museum Adventure Pass program was initiated last fall. Over 160 libraries and 25 museums and cultural organizations covering six counties are participating in this program that has truly taken on a life of its own. In only a little over five short months, more than 44,000 free museum adventure passes have been checked out from the libraries, resulting in visits by many Michigan families and individuals to cultural venues they were never before able to experience.

Further demonstrating our entrepreneurial skills in supporting our programs through the Library of Michigan Foundation, we made great use of a gift of over \$82,000 from Target last year to support Michigan Reads! This annual program encourages literacy by getting

teachers, parents, and caregivers to read to young children. The Library of Michigan sent out 4,700 program kits, containing the book, a professionally developed program guide, posters, stickers, and other information, to Michigan School Readiness Programs, HeadStart classrooms, public schools with classrooms for Kindergarten through second grade, and every public library and branch in the state. During the officially designated program month of September people were reading “Big Chickens” to at least 450,000 children all over the state. Fortunately, we have Target on board once again as the sole corporate sponsor for this year’s program. This coming September, we will feature Michigan author Nancy Shaw’s fun-filled book, “Raccoon Tune.”

Of course, libraries in the state offer their own programming all year long, and Michigan’s residents continue to utilize them as much as ever. A recent survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project and the University of Illinois found, quite contrary to generalized assumptions that libraries are needed and valued less in the age of the Internet than they were in the past, that 68% of Americans visiting libraries were there to use the public computer stations.

And, that’s not all the residents of Michigan go to the library to do. The latest available annual statistics we have collected show that Michigan’s public libraries circulated nearly 70 million items; were visited by over 48 million people; had children’s programming that attracted 1.5 million kids; and had nearly 13 million users of their public access Internet-connected computer stations. Had those Michigan residents purchased those circulated items, they would have expended over 2.4 billion dollars. Had they paid for Internet access at a commercial outlet at an average of \$12 per hour, they would have spent over 155 million dollars. The powerful return on investment of the Michigan public library is undeniable.

The Library of Michigan’s responsibility to the state’s libraries is highlighted in a 1977 *Michigan History Magazine* article written by John C. Larsen, called “‘All This from Books We Could Not Own:’ The Story of Michigan’s Traveling Libraries.” In the late 19th century and into the first quarter of the 20th century, then state librarian Mary

Spencer embarked upon a project to make state library materials available to all libraries (and as a result all residents) of the state. She developed Michigan's traveling library system, comprised of cases of "fifty books 'of the best literature' ..." By the end of the first year of the program, she was thrilled that these cases of books had been sent out to 44 libraries around the state. And those libraries had circulated from them about 10,000 books! (see *Michigan History Magazine*, Volume 61, Number 1, Spring 1977, pp. 33ff.)

Times have changed, but our Michigan eLibrary project is clearly the modern day reflection of that expanded mission of the Library of Michigan to serve all of the libraries of the state and all of its residents, not just state government. We continue to enhance the Michigan eLibrary, the anytime, anywhere library of online resources available through all Michigan libraries (public, academic, school, corporate and special) and from home, office, or anywhere Michigan residents have computer and Internet access, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We fund the Michigan eLibrary, found online at www.mel.org and commonly known as MeL, with federal Library Services and Technology Act dollars administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

The economy of scale embodied in MeL allows us to significantly enhance library service beyond what is provided locally around the state. In 2008, MeL's database resources include over 4.2 million dollars worth of commercially published online information, including millions of articles from over 45,000 magazines and newspapers, which, if purchased by subscription individually by the state's libraries would cost well over 72 million dollars.

But it's not just cost avoidance that makes MeL an essential part of the Michigan library landscape. The Michigan eLibrary Catalog (MeLCat), our online statewide resource sharing system, allows patrons of participating libraries all over the state to identify and borrow materials held by other participating MeLCat libraries. Mary Spencer would have been awed by this. From the 253 currently participating library collections, patrons can select from 30.2 million items, representing over 7.9 million titles, by going to MeLCat, searching for and identifying the material they are seeking and clicking the "get this for

me” button. In 2007 alone, this scenario was successfully played out over 345,000 times. Imagine the K through 12 school library or the community college library or the small rural public library with collections limited by budgets as well as space – these libraries are able to exponentially multiply what they can offer their students and patrons by participating in MeLCat.

This year we are adding another MeL component, the Michigan Educators’ Resources (or MER). MER will allow Michigan teachers and educators to conduct searches for online classroom materials and lesson plans based upon the newly established curriculum standards and grade level content expectations. This partnership among the Library of Michigan, the Michigan Dept. of Education, and Wayne State University Libraries will result in a resource that will augment curriculum-building opportunities for educators and bolster the success of our student population.

Already, students and educators access MeL to make significant use of the online ACT test preparation materials and practice test, available as part of the LearningExpress Library database that has been a part of the Michigan eLibrary for several years. The ACT is only one of hundreds of practice tests and test preparation materials included. A representative of the Clinton Task Force on Employment, Inc., working with the Capital Area Michigan Works Service Center, let us know how valuable this resource is:

“LearningExpress is user-friendly and offer[s] a wide variety of study material pertinent to individual skill sets needed. ... The LearningExpress Library link from MeL help[s] facilitate enrollees of all ages in preparing for high stakes testing to obtain or retain jobs, official GED tests, military entrance exams, and college entrance exams. ... As long as the State of Michigan and our Federal government continue to co-sponsor MeL and the LearningExpress Library as an educational resource, our clients will be introduced to its many benefits while they upgrade skills, prepare for GED testing, and/or make career changes.”

The Library of Michigan’s partnership with the libraries of the state, providing their local staffing and technical contributions, make the Michigan eLibrary one of the great

collaborative successes in the state of Michigan. This past fall we submitted our next 5-Year Plan for administering the annual LSTA allotments. The plan includes continued funding for the Michigan eLibrary over the next five years, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services enthusiastically approved this commitment.

Speaking of plans for the future, we have been gathering comment and input in our joint effort with Michigan's public libraries to update and strengthen the model for distribution and use of state aid to public libraries funding, which is so essential to the continued provision of excellent public library service for all of the residents of Michigan.

Additionally, the Library of Michigan is currently engaging with the Michigan Library Cooperative Directors Association to develop a three-year plan for cooperative services to Michigan libraries as part of the Quality Service Audit Checklist program that we have coordinated these past several years to establish benchmarks of service and outcomes for both library cooperatives and public libraries in Michigan. We are so pleased that, to date, nearly 140 (or about 1/3) of Michigan's public libraries and half of the 12 library cooperatives in the state have met the essential certification level of the QSAC program – with 24 libraries and 4 cooperatives meeting the enhanced certification level, and 3 libraries and 2 cooperatives having been certified at the highest, or excellent level.

Turning our attention to the Library of Michigan itself – this past year nearly 100,000 people visited us to research their family history and Michigan historical and current topics. We also had over 3,500 participants at our genealogy workshops and programs offered throughout the past year.

The Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped continues to serve over 3,500 regular users of the program who last year borrowed nearly 4,000 Braille books and 188,000 books on tape.

Last summer we proudly realized our long-time goal to move the State Law Library from the G. Mennen Williams Building into the Library of Michigan at the Michigan Library and Historical Center. The move made the collection and services vastly more accessible

and has heightened awareness about them. We are quite pleased to have had two Lansing Community College legal research classes using the Law Collection as their source of information for answering weekly class research assignments.

Like all of the libraries of the state, no matter what patron base they serve, they and we at the Library of Michigan work to provide library service that enhances the lives and the success of the residents of Michigan.